

Maine Charter School Commission

Maine Connections Academy, Inc.

March 3, 2014

Amended Findings of Fact Approved March 3, 2014.

Findings of Fact

Based upon review of the written proposal of **Maine Connections Academy, Inc.** (the “Applicant”), and other oral and written matter provided to the Commission, including but not limited to, interviews with and testimony of the Applicant, a public hearing and written submissions of the Applicant and the public, the Maine Charter School Commission (the “Commission”) finds the following:

1. Based upon the review provided by Commission staff and the Commission’s review team, the Applicant provided a complete application that included material responsive to all the elements identified in the Request for Proposal and Charter School Application issued August 12, 2013;
2. The Applicant meets the definition of a Public Charter School, as defined 20-A MRSA §2401(9), as indicated by:
 - a. The Applicant will have the ability to execute autonomy over key decisions, including, but not limited to, decisions concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum and instruction as evidenced in part by:
 - i. The Applicant’s Board of Directors (the “Board”) is composed of such individuals with the quality, experience and motivation to effectively meet this requirement;
 - ii. Notwithstanding the outsourcing of certain administrative functions , such as accounting and human resources to Connections Education (the “ESP”) or other providers, the staffing model of the school involving the direct hiring of instructors and a Chief Executive Officer, enables the Board of Directors to exercise direct control over critical areas of the school and thus effectively govern the school; and
 - iii. Draft contract provisions, together with such other contract requirements as may be required as a condition of the charter adopted by the Commission, will provide sufficient opportunity for independent control over the ESP, such that the school will be able to effectively maintain the autonomy over the matters set forth in this element of the definition.

- b. The Applicant is governed by a board that is independent of a school administrative unit as evidenced by the organizational documents provided in the Applicant's application submission and supporting materials.
 - c. The Applicant will be established and operated under the terms of a charter contract between the governing Board and the Commission upon acceptance of contract requirements adopted by the Commission.
 - d. The Applicant will operate a school to which parents choose to send their children for grades 7-12 as evidenced by its meeting minimum enrollment levels for students of those grades adopted by the Commission as a condition of its charter contract.
 - e. The Applicant will operate in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives as defined in its charter contract adopted by the Commission.
 - f. The Applicant will operate under the oversight of the Commission and in accordance with its charter contract.
- 3. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will create a high-quality school with high standards for pupil performance as evidenced in part by:
 - a. Although the evidence offered dates from 2010-11, comparative data provided in Section II.E of the application indicates that the ESP's program has generated strong results, including strong AP course performance, math/reading scores outpacing state average and SAT results above national averages.
 - b. A third-party reviewer of the Applicant's application noted similar strengths, including improvement in sub-group performances for disadvantaged students.
 - c. The Applicant has indicated a diverse course portfolio available to students, which should provide a range of educational opportunities.
 - d. The Applicant has highlighted specialty programs and extensive CTE offerings, including a program associated with the Juilliard School.
 - e. The Board's composition includes an experienced school administrator, whose resume and presentation to the review team and at the applicant's public hearing instilled confidence.
 - f. Each student will be managed through an individual learning plan and the application details the extensive use of metrics and assessments to manage student learning.
- 4. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students as evidenced in part by:
 - a. The program will provide opportunities for instruction to students who experience significant barriers to learning attendant with brick and mortar schools, such as students experiencing bullying or students with special needs exacerbated by proximity to other students.
 - b. The program will offer independent learning plans to every student, which will be useful in customizing learning to students that are below grade level or otherwise lagging peers in traditional settings.
 - c. The program will leverage extensive metrics and assessments to provide for real-time remediation of students offering the opportunity to enhance the performance of lower performing students.

- d. The program offers tutorials and “teachlets” - 24/7, providing increased opportunity for students to close achievement gaps.
- 5. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system as evidenced in part by:
 - a. The Applicant has highlighted specialty programs and extensive CTE offerings, including a program associated with the Juilliard School
 - b. The Applicant has indicated a diverse course portfolio available to students, which should provide a range of educational opportunities, including AP courses in greater quantity than generally available.
 - c. The program includes a significant number of field trips and similar events to enhance students’ educational experience.
- 6. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings as evidenced in part by:
 - a. The program will provide opportunities for instruction to students who experience significant barriers to learning attendant with brick and mortar schools, such as students experiencing bullying or students with special needs exacerbated by proximity to other students.
 - b. The program is customizable through the individual learning plan, providing opportunities for enhanced learning and performance in cases such as students with credit recovery needs or accelerated learning for students frustrated by lockstep traditional settings.
- 7. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel as evidenced in part by:
 - a. The virtual delivery model creates new professional experience for teachers and staff.
 - b. The application details professional training in virtual and computer technology as a platform for instruction.
 - c. The Applicant’s focus on metrics creates a response-to-intervention oriented and collaborative environment for teachers to learn together.
 - d. The Applicant’s use of a centralized teaching facility provides for the opportunity of good collaboration and group learning for teachers and staff.
 - e. The Applicant’s ESP offers robust continuing education and training, as well as access to an on-line master’s program.
- 8. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling as evidenced in part by:
 - a. The Applicant’s program of instruction based on virtual learning is different from the traditional education model.
 - b. As supported by finding 3 set forth above, the program will be of high quality.
- 9. The Applicant has provided evidence that it will provide students, parents, community members and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in public education system as evidenced in part by:

- a. The Applicant's description of field trips and similar events, including those described in Section II.B.6 of the application, will provide such expanded opportunities.
- b. The Applicant's past and proposed engagement with community organizations, such as those identified in Section II.B.6 of the application, will provide such expanded opportunities.
- c. The program's reliance on learning coaches and parents and the Board's stated intention to engage with them for student enrichment, will provide for such expanded opportunities.

Charter Contract Requirements

1. The Applicant will be required to conduct any lottery for enrollment as follows: enroll first all Grade 7-9 students and then grade 10, then 11, then 12, subject to the exceptions provide at law for siblings and other students.
2. Beginning in year two, the Board will hire an independent third party to evaluate the ESP and the school's execution of the education program described in the RFP, which report shall be provided to the Commission together with access to raw data and the consultant for questioning.
3. The Applicant shall conduct exit interviews with its employees and those of the ESP assigned to the school, together with students. Such interviews shall be summarized annually and provided to the Commission, together with access to raw data. In addition, the Applicant shall provide evidence of Board review and commitment to continuous improvement based on such interviews.
4. The Applicant shall have the fiscal capacity to adjust staffing in order to meet its program objectives and student needs.
5. The Applicant shall report back on the CEO's effectiveness to serve as HR and business manager, manage the ESP and serve as head-of-school with respect to the students and parents.
6. ESP's recruiters cannot be economically incented to recruit students, through such means as a capitation fee or bonus.
7. The Applicant shall liquidate the startup-loan of the ESP such that there is no debt-owned to the ESP after end of year three, other than ordinary trade credit.
8. Before enrolling greater than 390 students, the Commission must be satisfied as to the execution of the education program performance.
9. Opening enrollment of the school shall be 270 +/- 10%, with minimum enrollment thereafter being no less than 243 students at any time.
10. The Applicant shall hire an independent third party to annually survey parents and students for satisfaction with the educational program, ESP performance and such other matters determined by the Board or required by the Commission. Such surveys shall be summarized annually and provided to the Commission, together with access to raw data. In addition, the Applicant shall provide evidence of Board review and commitment to continuous improvement based on such interviews.
11. During recruitment, the Applicant must disclose and offer contact information for other virtual or blended school alternatives at the outset of the intake.
12. The Applicant will maintain a single cohort class, subject to attrition and un-recruited subsequent individual enrollments.
13. The Applicant's contract with its ESP must contain:
 - a. no exclusivity provision;
 - b. provision that the contract may be terminated at the sole discretion of the Applicant for any or no reason with reasonable notice to the ESP;
 - c. provision for pro-rata refund to school from ESP if a student withdraws prior to end of semester.